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SUBJECT: GEORGIA-SOUTH OSSETIA: POPOV PLEADS FOR ROY REEVE  
REF: 6/15 TRAUB E-MAIL

Classified By: PolMinCouns Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Summary: Russian Ambassador-at-Large for South Ossetia Yuriy Popov pled with us to ensure that Roy Reeve is extended as OSCE Head of Mission in Georgia until December. He said Reeve is a key brake against armed conflict. The emergence of Sanakoyev has made Kokoity hard to control and prone to resorting to force. Popov hoped the June 19 Chochiyev-Antadze meeting would resolve the water issue, but another set of issues -- roads, roadblocks and trenches -- remains before real negotiations can recommence. End Summary.

12. (C) Fresh from his appearance before the OSCE Small Group in Vienna (ref.), Popov made an emotional plea to us June 19 to persuade Georgia to allow the OSCE to extend Roy Reeve as HoM until December. He praised the work the OSCE is doing in the conflict zone. He said Reeve's toughness, experience, and the credibility he has built are essential to get through the summer without hostilities. In the current atmosphere of raised tensions, there are armed stand-offs every day. Popov thought Reeve's departure would remove one of the few brakes on armed conflict.

13. (C) Popov asked about Terhi Hakala, the Finnish nominee. We replied that she is sharp, knowledgeable, and will be as hard to push around as Reeve. Popov was happy to hear that, but said she would need time to acquaint herself with the issues and the cast of characters. The ideal time for a transition, he said, would be in January, after the Finns take over the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office. Until then, Reeve's presence will be essential. Popov noted that a 6-month extension for Reeve is the first choice of the U.S., Russia, Spain, and even the Finns. Only the Georgians are against it. He pled again for the U.S. to persuade Georgia to reverse its stance.

14. (C) The situation is so unstable, Popov said, because the introduction of Sanakoyev has made Kokoity insecure, unpredictable, and hard to control. Popov said it appears that the Georgians, heedful of U.S. admonitions not to start hostilities, appear to be trying to provoke Kokoity into starting hostilities for them. We disagreed; the Georgians are only following Russian and U.S. advice to try to make themselves more attractive to the Ossetians. The Georgians believe that Sanakoyev will simply win over the Ossetian population. Popov said, "That will take five years and fifty million dollars," which he believed the Georgians did not have.

15. (C) On the current water crisis, Popov said he had brokered a deal for the Ossetians to re-open the irrigation pipes in exchange for monitoring of repairs on the drinking water pipe, which is still only delivering 30 percent of the normal flow to Tskhinvali. The Georgians, he said, had broken the deal by imposing further demands afterwards. Popov suspected that the Georgian repair crew may have left a

certain amount of irrigation taps in exchange for bribes from farmers. Popov hoped the June 19 Chochiyev-Antadze meeting would resolve the issue.

16. (C) When the current crisis is resolved, Popov said, an earlier standoff remains before real talks can recommence: the tangle of roadblocks, bypass road excavations, and defensive trenches that both sides have undertaken in recent weeks. Popov viewed Reeve's proposal to double the number of monitors from eight to sixteen, and put the new monitors in the Georgian enclaves, as a good confidence-building measure that might help disentangle the set of tit-for-tat constructions and deconstructions.

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